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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG
NSC FOR HUDSON AND CPITTMAN
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ASEC](#) [KPKO](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: ONE DEAD IN ABYEI AFTER JIU AND JIPU CLASH, SITUATION NOW
QUIET, BUT TENSE

REF: A. KHARTOUM 1767

[1](#)B. KHARTOUM 1777

[1](#)1. (U) Over the course of two days, clashes between security forces in Abyei town are reported to have left one soldier dead, and nine individuals wounded. The first incident at 12:30PM on December 12 reportedly began with a dispute between a Southern Joint Integrated Police Unit (JIPU) policeman and an ethnic-Misseriya butcher in the town market place. According to one account, the butcher stabbed the policeman. When the JIPU fired into the air to disperse a gathering crowd, they were fired on by panicky Joint Integrated Unit (JIU) soldiers from the SAF, who thought they were under attack. Another version has it that the dispute escalated when the northern JIU soldiers intervened on the side of the butcher in his argument with police. The circumstances surrounding the noon December 13 gunfire (a separate reported incident) are unclear, but it may have begun when a group of JIU soldiers approached a police station in the market area.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In the first incident one JIU soldier was killed, and five other JIUs, two JIPUs, and two civilians were wounded. All of the wounded were medevaced by UNMIS to Kadugli. There were no known casualties in the second incident, according to UNMIS. Delegations from the Abyei Joint Military Commission quickly deployed to both Agok and Diffra in an effort to head off any attempt by either the SPLA or SAF to intervene in the conflict. The town is currently under a 6:00PM to 6:00AM curfew and UNMIS reports it is "extremely tense."

[1](#)3. (SBU) As was true at the start of the outbreak of fighting in May, most or all of the key decision makers were away and unable to intervene when the trouble started. UNMIS's immediate reaction to the gunfire was to withdraw to its compound. All of the principals, however, immediately returned to Abyei in order to regain control of the situation. These included Abyei Administrator Arop Mayok, JIU Commander Valentino, and UN Head of Office Christine Johnson. UNSYG Special Representative Ashraf Qazi also traveled from Khartoum to Abyei on December 13. UN South Sudan Humanitarian Coordinator David Gressly left Juba for Abyei on December 13 to assess the situation.

[1](#)4. (U) According to Mercy Corps and Save the Children/U.S. staff, several hundred civilians fled from Abyei to Agok following the shooting incidents. Relief workers report that the several hundred civilians who left Abyei in recent days had only just returned to Abyei after leaving during the May 2008 clashes. However, the humanitarian impact of the recent insecurity is likely to be minimal as most of Abyei's IDPs remain displaced in Agok, south of the Kiir River, since May. Those IDPs who did return to Abyei have left family members behind in Agok. Aid agencies have suspended activities in Abyei until the security situation improves, but continue to operate in Agok. USAID will continue to monitor the humanitarian impact.

15. (SBU) During a meeting with a visiting Congressional staff on December 14 (septel), MFA U/S Mutrif Siddiq also reported that the situation in Abyei is now calm and characterized the events as an "isolated incident." Siddiq said the GOS is more concerned with JEM. He said that given its recent build-up of vehicles in North Darfur (currently amassed in Kariari, according to Siddiq), JEM may be planning an attack on oil installations/pipelines in South Kordofan. To provide additional protection to oil installations and "prevent infiltration," the SAF has sent an additional six battalions to South Kordofan, according to Siddiq.

16. (SBU) Comment: The incident proves once more that Abyei remains a flash point between North and South, as well as local ethnic groups. As the May conflict demonstrated, a minor incident can easily flare out of control, especially if key leaders are not available to take prompt action. Bitter ethnic feelings and tensions in the region might be significantly reduced were the newly-installed Abyei Administration to begin significant development projects and have peace dividends to show to the population. However, recovery and development activities require a certain level of stability in order to implement projects that will make a difference in the lives of Abyei's citizens. This will require that the GNU start distributing the revenues to which the Administration is entitled under the Abyei Roadmap agreement. Post will continue to press GNU and NCP officials for the speedy release of these funds.

ASQUINO